

**ASSESSING FOREIGN LANGUAGES: THE NATIONAL  
STANDARDIZED ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (OPI)**

**Informational Handout**

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Nazareth  
COLLEGE

## **Document 1: The Oral Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2102)**

### **Welcome to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012**

Welcome to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 online. Here you will find the most current version of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading made interactive through the inclusion of glossed terms and multimedia exemplars. You can explore the Guidelines by skill or by level, listen to and read samples in English that represent abilities at each of the major **proficiency** levels.

### **General Preface to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012**

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are a description of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. For each skill, these guidelines identify five major levels of **proficiency**: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The levels of the ACTFL Guidelines describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability.

These Guidelines present the levels of proficiency as ranges, and describe what an individual can and cannot do with language at each level, regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The Guidelines are not based on any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they should not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of **functional language ability**.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published in 1986 as an adaptation for the academic community of the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions. This third edition marks the third edition of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines includes the first revisions of Listening and Reading since their original publication in 1986, and a second revision of the ACTFL Speaking and Writing Guidelines, which were revised to reflect real-world assessment needs in 1999 and 2001 respectively. New for the 2012 edition are the addition of the major level of Distinguished to the Speaking and Writing Guidelines, the division of the Advanced level into the three sublevels of High, Mid, and Low for the Listening and Reading Guidelines and the addition of general level description at the Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice levels for all skills.

Source: < <http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/> >

**Document 2: ACTFL standardized Foreign Language Textbook  
Evaluation Criteria : Guide and check-list (Curriculum Development)**

**1/ Standard-Based Textbook Evaluation Guide (pp. 4-9)**

**2/ Foreign Languages Textbook Evaluation check-list (pp. 10-11)**

**1/ Standard-Based Textbook Evaluation Guide**

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**STANDARDS-BASED TEXTBOOK EVALUATION GUIDE**  
**Foreign Language Standards Implementation Guide, Indiana Standards (2000)**  
**Developed by Sally Hood Cisar**  
**Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana**

Name of  
Textbook: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Goal: COMMUNICATION**

Browse the text and ancillaries for communicative activities that address each of the three standards for communication. Read through the activities carefully and rate them according to the listed criteria, using the scale 0 through 4.

Activity names(and/or numbers) \_\_\_\_\_ Pages \_\_\_\_\_

Not At All		Partially		Completely
<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

Do the activities allow students to personalize their response or provide their own meaning?	
Do the activities allow students to provide their own form and structure (grammar formation)?	
Do students interact with each other, a native speaker, or teacher in meaningful ways?	
Do the activities allow students to demonstrate or showcase their knowledge of and/or skill in using the foreign language?	
Do the activities include language that is authentic, accurate, and current?	
Is vocabulary presented in functional and/or cultural contexts or clusters?	
Are the activities set in a real-world context or represent a real-world task?	
Do the activities provide guidance or hints for facilitating comprehension?	
Do the activities allow for student variation in applying different strategies for comprehension?	
Do the activities appeal to students' interests?	
Are the activities age-appropriate?	

Comments :

**Goal: CULTURES**

PART ONE: Select several culturally-based visual images from the text and/or ancillaries and look at them carefully. Rate them according to the criteria listed below using the scale 0 through 4.

Visual images found on  
pages \_\_\_\_\_

Not At All                      Partially                      Completely  
**0                      1                      2                      3                      4**

Are they current?	
Are they authentic?	
Do they depict different peoples/cultures who use the foreign language for communication?	
Are text activities integrated with the visual images inviting student observation, identification, discussion, or analysis of cultural practices or products?	

PART TWO: Identify several culture sections in the text and ancillaries.

Culture sections found on  
pages \_\_\_\_\_

Not At All                      Partially                      Completely  
**0                      1                      2                      3                      4**

Are a variety of regions/countries where the foreign language is spoken represented?	
Do students have opportunities to participate in games, songs, celebrations, storytelling, dramatizations, sports, or entertainment representative of the foreign culture?	
Are students asked to identify, analyze or discuss perspectives, behaviors, or practices of the foreign culture (school, family, games, sports, etc.)?	
Are students asked to identify, experience, analyze, produce, or discuss tangible (toys, dress, foods, etc.) and expressive (artwork, songs, literature, etc.) products of the foreign culture?	

Comments:

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

Sum Total of Parts One and Two: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:CONNECTIONS**

Peruse the text to find opportunities for students to connect their foreign language learning with other disciplines in the school curriculum and beyond. Rate them according to the criteria below using the scale 0 through 4.

Opportunities for making connections found on pages\_

Not At All		Partially		Completely
<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

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Do students have opportunities to discuss or discover more about concepts and topics learned in other subject areas (math, science, history, geography, art, literature, music, health, etc.)?	
Are there opportunities for students to build on prior personal experiences and existing background knowledge?	
Are students given opportunities to participate in projects in which they acquire information through technology, personal interviews, print media (newspapers, magazines), visual media (television, videos, advertising) or print references (dictionaries, encyclopedias)?	
Does the text provide sources written for native speakers of the foreign language (age and language appropriate stories, poems, songs, media, etc.)?	

Comments :

**Goal:COMPARISONS**

PART ONE: Locate sections that present comparisons of the students' own language and the foreign language. Rate them according to the criteria below using the scale 0 through 4.

Opportunities for making language comparisons found on pages\_\_\_\_\_

Not At All                      Partially                      Completely  
**0                      1                      2                      3                      4**

Does the text present discussion or activities based on borrowed words, cognates, and idiomatic expressions in the students' native language and the foreign language?	
Does the text offer opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of similarities and differences between their own language and the foreign language being studied?	

Comments:

PART TWO: Locate sections that present comparisons of the students' own culture and the culture(s) of speakers of the foreign language. Opportunities for making culture comparisons found on pages\_\_\_\_\_

Not At All                      Partially                      Completely  
**0                      1                      2                      3                      4**

Are similarities and differences presented between the culture(s) of speakers of the foreign language and the students' own culture?	
Does the text offer opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of similarities and differences between their own culture and the culture(s) of speakers of the foreign language being studied?	

Comments :

**SumTotal of Parts One and Two:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:COMMUNITIES**

Locate areas in the text and ancillaries that suggest using the language beyond the classroom. Rate them according to the criteria below using the scale 0 through 4.

Opportunities for addressing communities found on  
pages\_\_\_\_\_

Not At All		Partially		Completely
0	1	2	3	4

Are students asked to communicate with speakers of the foreign language outside their own classroom (in conversation, writing, performances, or presentations)?	
Does the text identify professions, careers, or everyday situations which require or are enhanced by proficiency in the foreign language?	
Does the text present foreign language/culture projects that involve interacting with members of the local community or using community resources?	
Are students encouraged or given opportunities to use the language for leisure activities (media, sports, games, travel, music, reading, etc.)?	

Comments:

SumTotal of All Goal Areas: \_\_\_\_\_



### TEXTBOOK COMPARISON CHART: SUMMARY OF SCORES

This graphic organizer is a tool for comparing and contrasting textbooks assessed using the Standards-Based Textbook Evaluation Guide. Recording the name of each textbook in the chart along with scores obtained from each of the goals and the sum total of all five goals will reveal the textbook's strengths and weaknesses in terms of its alignment to the national and state standards for foreign languages. This information will also be helpful in ascertaining which goal areas might require supplementary attention and resources if the textbook proves to be weak in a particular area.

Name of Textbook	Score from Communication	Score from Cultures	Score from Connections	Score from Comparisons	Score from Communities	Grand Total from all Five Goals

*Oklahoma Standards for World Languages – Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS)  
Languages PASS Module I – Checklists  
October 2002*

**STANDARDS-BASED TEXTBOOK EVALUATION GUIDE**  
**Foreign Language Standards Implementation Guide, Indiana Standards (2000)**  
**Developed by Sally Hood Cisar**  
**Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana**

## 2/ Foreign Languages Textbook Evaluation check-list

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# Textbook Evaluation Instrument Based on the ACTFL Standards

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning afford us the opportunity to review every aspect of our delivery of instruction. One such element to be considered is textbook selection. Based on the Standards, textbook evaluation has become expanded to include the 5 C's as well as the seven curricular elements. What follows is a sample textbook evaluation instrument that uses the Standards' organizing principles and elements as the points of comparison among different textbooks. Suggested numerical values have been given for each of the five organizing principles and curricular elements to assist in the selection process.

This instrument will help you evaluate as many as four different programs. Each question in a section has been given a maximum point value which you can use to rate the program. If scores between programs run close, go back to the section(s) that mean the most to you and compare those scores.

EVALUATING ACCORDING TO THE 5 C'S	PROGRAM			
	A	B	C	D
<b>Communication (Section total: 20 points)</b> 1. Are students introduced to essential vocabulary and grammatical structures? (4 pts.) 2. Do the activities move from controlled to transitional to communicative? Is there a balance between listening, speaking, reading, and writing? (4 pts.) 3. Are there a variety of meaningful activities that provide opportunities for individual, paired, cooperative learning, and information gap activities? (4 pts.) 4. Are the activities set in an age-appropriate context and are they level-appropriate? (4 pts.) 5. Is there a spiraling presentation of concepts that builds in a perpetual review of vocabulary and grammar concepts? (4 pts.)				
<b>Cultures (Section total: 10 points)</b> 1. Are there are wide variety of authentic, up-to-date visual images of the target culture? (2 pts.) 2. Is the cultural information age-appropriate to stimulate interest? (2 pts.) 3. Is a broad range and diverse representation of countries presented? (2 pts.) 4. Does the teaching of the target culture incorporate the learners exploring their own culture? (2 pts.) 5. Are both "Little c" and "Big C" culture represented? (2 pts.)				
<b>Connections (Section total: 10 points)</b> 1. Are the students afforded opportunities to utilize the target language in conjunction with other subject areas such as math and science? (5 pts.) 2. Are there themes that encourage cross-disciplinary projects? (5 pts.)				
<b>Comparisons (Section total: 10 points)</b> 1. Are students asked to look at their own native language and compare it linguistically to the target language? (5 pts.) 2. Are students asked to compare their own culture and make comparisons with the target culture to discover similar and different cultural concepts and patterns? (5 pts.)				
<b>Communities (Section total: 10 points)</b> 1. Are students provided with role models or individuals who use foreign languages in their lives for personal interest and enjoyment? (5 pts.) 2. Are students given examples of ways they can use their foreign language in the future beyond the school experience? (5 pts.)				
<b>Subtotal</b>				

EVALUATING ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN CURRICULAR COMPONENTS	PROGRAM			
	A	B	C	D
<b>Language Systems (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Is the vocabulary functional, thematic, authentic, and practical? (1 pt.) 2. Is the number of vocabulary words manageable? (1 pt.) 3. Is grammar presented in a logical way? (1 pt.) 4. Is there sufficient oral and written practice of the grammar concepts that lead from controlled to meaningful to communicative use of the language? (1 pt.) 5. Is the grammar presented clearly and easy to understand? (1 pt.)				
<b>Communication Strategies (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Are listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural strategies (such as circumlocution, making and verifying hypotheses, making inferences, and predicting) presented and practiced? (5 pts.)				
<b>Cultural Knowledge (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Is the cultural content accurate and current? (3 pts.) 2. Are the cultural notes/readings interesting, significant, and appropriate for the age level? (2 pts.)				
<b>Learning Strategies (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Does the text provide the learners with strategies at point of use to help them be successful listeners, speakers, readers, and writers of the language? (1 pt.) 2. Are pair and cooperative learning activities plentiful and meaningful? (2 pts.) 3. Are the multiple intelligences (such as visual, musical, and kinesthetic) utilized so as to support the variety of learner types in the classroom? (2 pts.)				
<b>Content from Other Subject Areas (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Are there activities/projects in every chapter/unit that engage the students in meaningful activities that cross other disciplines where the students can use their emerging language skills and see the connection with other disciplines? (5 pts.)				
<b>Critical Thinking Skills (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Are students asked to do more than rote memorization and recall? (2 pts.) 2. Are the students asked to utilize the higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in every chapter and are expectations reasonable? (3 pts.)				
<b>Technology (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Does the program have listening activities in the pupil's edition? (1 pt.) 2. Does the program have a video that is integrated with the text? (1 pt.) 3. Does the program have a CD-ROM that provides meaningful and interactive practice? (1 pt.) 4. Does the program have a website?(1 pt.) 5. Does the program suggest engaging, worthwhile Internet activities?(1 pt.)				
<b>Other Features (Section total: 5 points)</b> 1. Is the general appearance of the text and accompanying ancillaries attractive and inviting? (1 pt.) 2. Are the chapters/units well organized and offer easy progression? (1 pt.) 3. Is the teacher's edition well organized with practical teaching suggestions at the point of need? (1 pt.) 4. Is the program easily adaptable to fit different teaching situations or schedule configurations? (1 pt.) 5. Does the testing program assess all four skills plus culture? Does it offer native speaker exams, scantron, multiple forms of exams, and portfolio? (1 pt.)				
<b>Subtotal</b>				
<b>Subtotal from previous section</b>				
<b>Total</b>				
<b>Overall impression</b>				

### Document 3: Oral Proficiency Levels in the Work World

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ACTFL Level	US Gov	Language Functions	Corresponding Professions/Positions	Examples of Who Is Likely to Function at the Level?
Distinguished	5 4	Ability to tailor language to specific audience, persuade, negotiate. Deal with nuance and subtlety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diplomat, Contract Negotiator, International Specialist, Translator/Interpreter, Intelligence Specialist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly articulate, professionally specialized native speakers;</li> <li>L2 learners with extended (17 years) and current professional and/or educational experience in the target culture</li> </ul>
Superior	3	Discuss topics extensively, support opinions, hypothesize. Deal with linguistically unfamiliar situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University FL Professor, Business Executive, Lawyer, Judge, Financial Advisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-educated native speakers</li> <li>Educated L2 learners with extended professional and/or educational experience in the target language environment</li> </ul>
Advanced High	2+	Narrate and describe in past, present and future and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physician, Military Linguist, Senior Consultant, Human Resources Personnel, Financial Broker, Translation Officer, Marketing Manager, Communications Consultant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L2 learners with graduate degrees in language-related area and extended educational experience in target environment</li> </ul>
Advanced Mid	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fraud Specialist, Account Executive, Court Stenographer / Interpreter, Benefits Specialist, Technical Service Agent, Collection Representative, Estimating Coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage speakers, informal learners, non-academic learners who have significant contact with language</li> </ul>
Advanced Low			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customer Service Agent, Social Worker, Claims Processor, K-12 Language Teacher, Police Officer, Maintenance Administrator, Billing Clerk, Legal Secretary, Legal Receptionist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate language majors with year-long study abroad experience</li> </ul>
Intermediate High	1+	Create with language, initiate, maintain and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Auto Inspector, Aviation Personnel, Missionary, Tour guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate language majors without year-long study abroad experience.</li> </ul>
Intermediate Mid	1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cashier, Sales clerk (highly predictable contexts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L2 learners after 6-8 year sequence of study (AP, etc.) or</li> </ul>
Intermediate Low			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receptionist, Housekeeping Staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4-6 semester college sequence</li> <li>L2 learners after 4 year high school sequence or 2 semester college sequence</li> </ul>
Novice High Novice Mid Novice Low	0+  0	Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L2 learners after 2 years of high school language study</li> </ul>

## **Bibliography:**

ACTFL OPI Tester Certification Information © 2012 ACTFL, Inc.

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012:  
<<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org>>

ACTFL Language Proficiency Tester Training Site: “About the ACTFL Proficiency Interview (OPI)” © 2012 ACTFL, Inc.

OPI Tester Certification Packet (Assessment) © 2012 ACTFL, Inc.

LTI: <<http://www.languagetesting.com/oral-proficiency-interview-opi>>